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Academics and the CIA

LAST SUNDAY on this page we published a statement by Michel Oksenberg which supported the CIA's position in the case of Nathan Gardels vs. Central Intelligence Agency. Mr. Gardels is suing the CIA to obtain information about the agency's covert activities on University of California campuses; he is a graduate student in Political Science. Mr. Oksenberg is a Political Science professor at the University of Michigan on indefinite leave to serve on the National Security Council as a China expert.

In his affidavit Mr. Oksenberg admits having had a confidential relationship with the CIA while he was teaching on campus. Mr. Oksenberg explained that soon after he entered academic life he began to meet CIA officials at scholarly conventions, conferences, and seminars. "I soon found that these CIA officials were professional colleagues of mine; that is, although we did not agree on all matters nor was any pressure placed on me to alter my views, we shared many common interests, we had similar academic backgrounds, we worked with similar unclassified data, and, therefore, we face many similar methodological concerns," he said.

The "cornerstone" of his relationship with the CIA, he said, is strict confidentiality. Mr. Oksenberg said he felt that if the CIA were to reveal not just the names of other professors with similar relationship, and he said there are many, but even the names of institutions where these academics work, it would "destroy the candor and utility of the exchange" — an exchange which he said is beneficial to academics and the national interest.

Mr. Oksenberg said this confidentiality is needed to protect academics from public criticism and scorn which would follow the revelation of such a relationship, because the "CIA is much

maligned and misunderstood on today's campuses.

On the contrary, the CIA is very well understood on college campuses today. Perhaps this is the reason these academics would be subject to public criticism and scorn.

At one point, Mr. Oksenberg defends his relationship with the CIA on the premise that a "free exchange of ideas" is important to his counterparts in the agency and at the university. Certainly no one would deny that the free exchange of ideas is not only the principle on which a university functions, but the foundation of democracy. The CIA, however, seems to be involved in a rather one-sided exchange. Its secrets or cooperation are rendered only to those who would be of service to the agency. Relatively few academics receive the benefits Mr. Oksenberg enjoyed as a result of his secret relationship.

Mr. Oksenberg's statement raises many serious questions as he suspected it would. It is important to bring the discussion of CIA campus activities into the open; in this, he has done a great service to this University community and others. It is unfortunate that his intentions were to preserve a system which smacks of favoritism and has impinged on the civil liberties of those who become victims of the CIA's covert recruiting operation.

In its final report, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities expressed concern "that American academics involved in such activities may undermine public confidence that those who train our youth are upholding the ideals, independence, and integrity of American universities." It would be wise for everyone to consider the Select Committee's concern when pondering the questions raised by Mr. Oksenberg's defense of the CIA.

THE MICHIGAN DAILY
21 January 1979

In support of the CIA

Editor's note: What follows this note is an affidavit by Michael Oksenberg submitted in the case of Nathan Gardels vs. Central Intelligence Agency. Mr. Oksenberg is a professor at the University of Michigan on indefinite leave to serve on the National Security Council as an advisor on China.

Mr. Gardels is a graduate student at the University of California where he studies political science. In 1976, after the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities revealed that the CIA uses academics at more than 100 American colleges and universities to make "introductions for intelligence purposes" and other tasks, Mr. Gardels submitted to the CIA a Freedom of Information (FOIA) request asking for access to all documents relating to CIA contacts at the University of California, specifically including all contractual arrangements and personnel relationships.

The CIA provided Mr. Gardels with more than 800 documents, some of which revealed that a UC vice-president had received CIA training and operated on campus at a covert agent for the Agency. The CIA informed Mr. Gardels that it would neither confirm nor deny the existence of any additional documents which would be responsive to his request and added that if such documents did exist, those documents would be withheld pursuant to section (b) (1) of the FOIA which allows the CIA to protect the identity of its personnel.

Last February Mr. Gardels initiated a lawsuit against the CIA asking the court to order the CIA to produce the requested documents for inspection and copying. The court has not yet reached a decision on the case.

Affidavit of Michel Oksenberg

Michel Oksenberg, Staff Member, National Security Council Staff, being duly sworn, deposes and says:

1. I was appointed as a member of the National Security Council Staff on January 20, 1977, and I continue to serve in that position.

2. Prior to joining the National

Security Council Staff, I entered graduate school in 1960 and served since 1966 as a member of the faculties of three major United States universities. I am currently on academic leave from one of these universities, and I intend to teach there once my government service ends.

3. Soon after entering academic life, I began to meet members of the Central Intelligence Agency at various professional meetings, annual conventions of such national associations as the American Political Science Association, academic conferences and seminars, and public meetings. CIA employees openly identified themselves at these meetings; they made no effort to hide their institutional affiliation. I soon found that these CIA officials were professional colleagues of mine; that is, although we did not agree on all matters nor was any pressure placed on me to alter my views, we shared many common interests, we had similar academic backgrounds, we worked with similar unclassified data, and, therefore, we face many similar methodological concerns. As did many other of my university associates, I gradually came to realize that I could have the same kind of professional association with CIA personnel, as well as State and Defense Department officials, that I had with my university colleagues—criticizing one another's papers before publication, corresponding about research problems, and so on. As with my professional exchanges with my academic colleagues, these exchanges were held in confidence by the parties involved. Further, we dealt exclusively with unclassified information.

4. My contacts with Agency personnel were not unusual; many other academics had similar contacts. But I have decided to go on record and to acknowledge publicly this relationship with Agency personnel because I strongly believe

that requiring the Agency to disclose the names of other academics who developed similar personal relations will destroy associations that benefit both academics and the foreign policy interests of the United States. I have made this decision in full awareness of the fact that the action I am taking will lead to questioning and criticism of my part in these relations, and may in fact adversely affect my future academic career.

5. The free exchange of ideas with counterparts both in and out of academe is one very important way in which academics are able to advance and gauge their intellectual growth and currency once their formal schooling has ended. I benefited greatly from the comments and criticisms that I received from Agency members with whom I shared my work. Similarly, I like to think that some Agency members benefited from my comments on their unclassified papers and thoughts (many of which were subsequently published with CIA authorship acknowledged.) Further, the relations that I developed over the years with our government's foreign policy community were an important factor in my deciding to enter government service for a period, and my effectiveness in the government certainly has been enhanced by the personal contacts that were established during my academic years.

6. The cornerstone of my relations with Agency personnel, as with my other professional colleagues, is that our exchanges are conducted in strict confidence. It is common practice for academics to share their hypotheses, research designs, and writings prior to publication with a substantial number of colleagues on a confidential basis. Any breach of confidentiality would destroy the candor and utility of the exchange. I believe it would be unfortunate if American academics could not have confidential professional associations with their

professional colleagues in the government, with every piece of correspondence thus becoming a possible matter of public record. A barrier to communication between university and government personnel would thereby be erected that would not serve our national interest.

7. Confidentiality of correspondence with Agency personnel is also a necessity because the CIA is much maligned and misunderstood on today's campuses. Even the hint of an association with the Agency, including a professional association dealing exclusively with unclassified materials on academic topics, subjects academics to abuse and scorn, and very well may endanger their academic careers. In fact, given the climate on today's campuses, even the disclosure of the fact that such associations exist at a particular university would lead ultimately to strong pressure to identify the academics involved.

8. Therefore, if the Agency is required to disclose any information that would identify, or lead to the identification of academics who have association with the Agency, such associations would be effectively terminated, because those currently involved would be smeared, while young professors would be dissuaded from entering into similar situations. Because I believe that this result is harmful to the academics and their institutions, as well as to the general foreign policy interests of the United States, I would respectfully urge that disclosure of such information not be required.

MICHEL OKSENBERG
Staff Member
National Security Council
Washington, D.C.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 8th day of September, 1978.

SAMMIE L. NEWMAN
Notary Public
My commission expires
March 26, 1980